

(1) Ghani Vows ...

are now motivated by revenge. They (IS) have confronted the wrong people," Ghani said on the sidelines of World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos. The US State Department earlier this month formally designated the group's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- which calls itself "Khorasan Province" -- as a terrorist organisation.

The name Khorasan refers to a historic region which includes parts of modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and neighbouring countries.

The White House this month also gave the US military legal authority to target the group's fighters in Afghanistan, the first such authorisation for military action against the group outside Iraq and Syria, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The jihadists have managed to attract disaffected Taliban fighters increasingly lured by the group's signature brutality.

In a sign of their growing reach in Afghanistan, the group has taken to the airwaves with a 90-minute Pashto-language radio show called "Voice of the Caliphate".

The government has said it is trying to block the broadcast, which is beamed from an undisclosed location and aimed at winning new recruits.

"The militant network is on the run in Nangarhar," Ghani told CNN in another interview in Davos.

"They have committed unspeakable atrocities there... We are starting to drive them out." (AFP)

(2) Governors to...

and they talked about their efforts at ensuing good governance and presented their demands and suggestions in this regard.

The top provincial officials mentioned problems originating from the weak capacity of some provincial officials, running some departments by acting heads, non-implementation of welfare and development projects, lack of electricity, health services, lack of access to clean drinking water, shortage of gas and the lack of market for agricultural and industrial products in their respective provinces.

After hearing from the governors, the president directed the departments concerned to resolve the mentioned problems and tasked the governors with new responsibilities towards good governance, security and economic development.

Later, the higher education minister informed the president about the university entrance exam in various provinces and said the exam had been transparent in 15 provinces this year compared to the past.

She also mentioned interference in the exam process by irrelevant individuals particularly the provincial council members. The president directed provincial governors to prevent such interferences in the university entrance test.

The president said from now on, provincial police chiefs would be appointed in consultations with the provincial governors, who would also assess the justice and judicial affairs in their respective provinces. (Pajhwok)

(3) Selection Committee...

He said that the committee does not want to continue its activities in contravention of the constitution.

Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani's deputy spokesman, Sayed Zafar Hashimi, reiterated government's commitment to bring reforms to the electoral system.

"Government is committed to bring reforms and consultations in this regard are under way. There are several options and one of the options will soon be chosen," he said.

Media watchdog organizations threatened that people will not participate in elections, unless electoral reforms are brought.

Jandad Speenghar, a member of the Afghan Civil Society and Elections Network (ACSEN), said that the government should stop paying mere lip service. "Promises cannot convince people that reforms will be brought. Government should take practical steps," he added.

Based on the agreement signed between the two leaders -- President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Abdullah Abdullah, electoral reforms should be brought.

Wolesi Jirga rejected two presidential decrees regarding electoral reforms -- a decree on the amendment of the law on structure, functions and responsibilities of electoral commissions and a decree on the amendment of the electoral law.

(Tolonews)

(4) Afghan Army...

Taliban, as it as it shares a border of more than 250 kilometers (155 miles) with Pakistan. It grows large quantities of opium, used to produce most of the world's heroin. The harvest is worth up to \$3 billion a year, and helps fund the insurgency.

The Afghan Defense Ministry confirmed the changes in Helmand. It said veteran army Gen. Moheen Faqiri was appointed to lead the corps and took over two months ago.

Gen. Dawlat Waziri, the ministry's spokesman, said brigade commanders have also been rotated out and replaced.

"Soon, other army units will have new commanders there," Waziri said.

In October, a meeting of the National Security Council discussed the worsening situation on the ground. In the presence of President Ashraf Ghani and U.S. Army Gen. John F. Campbell, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the NSC heard that Afghan security forces were badly led, poorly equipped and in the previous three months had suffered 900 casualties, including 300 dead.

Minutes of the Oct. 29 meeting, obtained by the AP, show that Helmand was described by the former head of the intelligence agency, Rahmatullah Nabil, as "the biggest recruiting pool for the Taliban" and the insurgents' "primary source of revenue" from poppy for heroin and marble smuggling.

Another concern is the Afghan police who are fighting on the frontlines across Helmand, often without the equipment and backup of the army, which means casualties are higher.

Last Wednesday, Gen. Abdul Rahman Sarjang, the Helmand provincial police chief, said the Afghan security forces were "exhausted" and in dire need of reinforcements. He also told the AP that a lack of coordination between the army and police was hampering progress in the fight.

The Taliban have made serious stands in seven Helmand districts - Sangin, Gereshk, Khanashin, Musa Qala, Nawzad, Washer and Marjah - and at least three districts of Lashkar Gah are also under threat, Sarjang said.

The changes in Helmand reflect that Afghanistan's civilian and military leaders are learning the limitations of the security forces as they take on the Taliban alone following the drawdown of the international combat mission at the end of 2014. The U.S. and NATO maintain 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, mostly in an advisory and training capacity.

In a most serious illustration of the dire battlefield situation in Helmand, the district of Sangin was besieged for weeks and in late December fears escalated that it would completely fall to the insurgents. The United States conducted airstrikes on Taliban positions, the British rushed special forces advisers to the area, and the Afghan military dropped food and ammunition to soldiers and police who were surrounded in their base.

Nabil told the NSC meeting there were about 12,000 Taliban fighters in Helmand, up to 60 percent of them from other parts of the country - evidence the insurgents had reinforced their numbers for the fight. Nabil also said Afghan forces' morale was "extremely low" and discipline had broken down with "junior commanders openly defying their superiors."

"Helmand is in a crisis," Nabil told the meeting. Shoffner, the U.S. general, said troops had been moved from other parts of the country to reinforce Helmand and that strategies have to change.

The notion that there is a "fighting season is outdated," he said, as the Taliban offensives - which in the past occurred in the warmer, summer months - have escalated even in colder weather.

NATO officials have told the AP that Afghan troops have taken huge casualties - 28 percent higher in 2015 than before the international combat mission ended, according to reports received by the international coalition. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the reports.

Afghan authorities do not release the casualty tolls for their combat forces. In 2014 that figure was estimated to have been about 5,000. (AP)

(5) Europol Launches...

already playing an important part in the European response to terrorist threats, he added.

"After the Paris attacks, Europol assigned up to 60 officers to support the French and Belgian investigation in Taskforce Fraternelle. Up to now, significant quantity of information has been received from these two countries, resulting in 800 intelligence leads and more than 1,600 leads on suspicious financial transactions," he added. The launching ceremony took place during the informal meeting of the EU's Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs. The Netherlands now holds the six-month presidency of the European Union. (Xinhua)

(6) Kabul Rejects ...

time that the Taliban has set pre-conditions, calling on the group to avoid such a move and raise their issues at the peace table.

The HPC warned that no breakthrough would be achieved, unless there is face to face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

"All sides can discuss their issues at the negotiation table, setting pre-conditions for peace talks can undermine the process," HPC member Jajji Din Mohammad said.

The Taliban announced their pre-conditions for attending the peace process with the Afghan government on Saturday in Doha during a two day meeting at Pugwash research center.

Recognition of Taliban's political office in Qatar, removing the name of the Taliban group from the UN blacklist, a halt to the arrest and elimination of the group's fighters, the release of Taliban inmates from jails and a swift stoppage to anti-Taliban propaganda is what the group has requested.

"We categorically announced to the world that we want peace and we want to resolve Afghanistan's issues through negotiations and this is our political message. They blame us that we do not endorse peace and are insisting on war. We want peace on condition that the opposing side also shows willingness for peace. If they (government) continue efforts for elimination and killing us, in that case, we will adopt the same approach," Mohammad Naeem, a spokesman at the Taliban office's in Qatar said.

Mohammad Omar Dawoudzai, a member of the new Council for the Solidarity and Protection of Afghanistan, Anwarul Haq Ahadi and the chairman of The New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF) participated from Afghanistan in the two day meeting. However, no delegation represented Afghan government at the meeting.

"My assessment is that it is a good beginning and there is a positive environment among the participants. A wide range of issues were discussed. There is unanimous views over a number of key points which can be proved helpful for peace strategy in the future. If we are able to get advantage of the common points, the way will be paved for direct peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban," Dawoudzai said.

Following the preconditions of the Taliban for the resumption of peace talks with Kabul, the Afghan government rejected the Taliban move, reiterating that the peace talks with the insurgent group will be in line with the decision of the quadrilateral meeting.

"We negotiate with the groups that abandon violence and acts of terrorism and accepts all norm and principles for peace which are explained at an international level," Sayed Zafar Hashemi, a deputy presidential spokesman said on Monday.

Referring to the Taliban's preconditions for peace, Hajji Din Mohammad, a member of the Afghan peace council said that such moves could impact the resumption of a meaningful dialogue, calling any meeting without the participation of Afghan government impractical. "Those who are supposed to talk with the government of Afghanistan in the future are chosen by Pakistan. They [Pakistan] are the ones who set the conditions, the preconditions which recently tabled by Taliban aren't among their [Pakistan] conditions," military analyst Jawed Kohistani said.

Abbas Stanekzai, in-charge of Taliban political office in Qatar, represented the 11 member Taliban delegation at the two day conference. This comes a few days after members of the quadrilateral meeting in Kabul announced to they would convene their third meeting in Islamabad on 6 February to finalize the venue and timeline of the talks with the Taliban.

The Afghan government has set end of April as a deadline for peace talks. (Tolonews)

(7) 46 Land-Grabbers...

the illegal occupation of state-owned land. But he believed more efforts were needed to wrest back the government's properties. (Pajhwok)

(8) Doha Meeting...

freedom for all parties to discuss the path to peace needs to be ensured from now on. The highest priority in this regard is enabling all sides to sit together. Blacklists should be eliminated and freedom of movement should be guaranteed. Visas should be facilitated for those to attend such discussions. All agreed that the Taliban should have an office and an address.

6. To foster dialogue among all parties, some participants invoked Afghanistan's long-established tradition of the Jirga. A peace Jirga of credible, impartial Afghans could be convened, perhaps drawn from participants at this conference. Other institutions, such as Pugwash, could also provide a forum, but Afghans must lead. It was pointed out that the Doha dialogue and its follow-ups do not interfere with the current quadrilateral talks.

7. A ceasefire should be part of negotiations.

8. The protection of civilians and an end to civilian casualties are shared goals and high priorities. The recent increase in civilian casualty rates, including the heavy toll on children and women, was noted. All sides should ensure accountability and the prosecution of abuses.

9. Constitutional issues are of primary concern and need to be discussed in specific detail. Afghanistan should have an Islamic government. According to some participants, the present constitution needs to be changed, provided that it be based on Islam and enforce national sovereignty. A fundamental concern is that any constitution should ensure there will be no monopoly of power and no discrimination against people with different religions and backgrounds. (Pajhwok)

(9) MoD Dismiss ...

groups - with long standing claims that they allow them to operate against Afghanistan from Pakistani territory.

"Pakistan gets rewards of the seeds it grew to destabilize Afghanistan, there is no insurgent hideouts in Afghanistan," military analyst Hai Gul Sulaimankhail said.

"Nawaz Sharif and ex-Pakistani officials play a key role in trying to disintegrate the Afghan national army and pose serious threats to Afghanistan's national sovereignty and continuation of war in Afghanistan. Pakistan by making such allegations want to confuse the world's perception," MP Mohammad Abdoh said. (Tolonews)

(10) Taliban Control...

of Imam Sahib, Dashi-i-Archi, Qala-i-Zal, Khanabad and Chahar Dara districts, the guerrilla presence had been taking a heavy toll on education. "The Taliban train students against the government and recruit them for fighting. Our elders should make a decision on the issue," he demanded.

Version of education department The acting director of education rejected as baseless claims about the closure of schools. Not a single school was shut and the education process was going on smoothly, he insisted.

Students of five schools that were destroyed in recent clashes are going to nearby schools. They had appeared without any major problems in their annual exams, the official maintained. Students await stability Although some schools were closed due to insecurity, they continued with their studies by going to other schools, said Abdul Malik, an eighth-grade student. Enrolled at the Abdul Fatah School in Chahardara district, he appeared in the annual exams elsewhere. (Pajhwok)

(11) Baghlan Military...

said Ajmal, a local police force member.

However, the Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri spoke out about launching a large-scale military offensive against the Taliban in Baghlan province.

"Our forces are all ready and we will not allow any group to have strongholds in Afghanistan," he said.

According to local officials in Baghlan, Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-

e-Shahab areas in Pul-e-Khumri city are under control of the Taliban. (Tolonews)

(12) Helmand Consumers

situation of our performance is weak because our income is very low," he added.

He said the Breshna Sherkat had cut off power supply to the factory over the past two months, an issue he had shared with the government officials concerned for solution.

Karkar added he would pay the arrears as soon as his factory earned some income.

Not only in Helmand, government offices and some people in other provinces including capital Kabul also owe millions of Afghans in unpaid power bills to the power utility. (Pajhwok)

(13) Ghani Attends...

gathering there, killing and wounding a large number of people. Shinwari's father, Malak Osman, was among those injured in the attack. A separate statement from the palace said President Ghani visited Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan hospital in Kabul and inquired after the health condition of Malak Osman and others injured in the attack in Jalalabad. (Pajhwok)

(14) ANSF Liberate...

Army, as well as police, civil order police and the National Directorate of Security (NDS), another official from the military told the agency. US Marines and Gunnery Sergeant Nate Cosby (R), Staff Sergeant Josh Lacey (2nd R) and Navy Hospitalman 2 Daniel Holmberg (L) from Border Adviser Team (BAT) and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) 1st and 2nd Marine Division (Forward) walk through opium poppy field at Maranj village in Helmand province on April 25, 2011 as they take patrol with their team and Afghanistan National Police. (Sputnik news)

(15) 15 Rebels, 2 ...

heavy snowfall had blocked exit points for the fighters.

He urged the government to accelerate the offensive to purge the entire province of insurgents. After the snow melted, he argued, the guerrillas would be able to leave the province easily. (Pajhwok)

(16) Jawzjan Revenue ...

A shopkeeper in Shibergan, Zaidullah, recalled that in 2014 they had paid 1,750 afs in annual tax, but last year the tax was increased to 2,500 afs. It was good for the government to raise taxes and thereby boost its revenue, but the hike was not affordable for ordinary shopkeepers, whose business was not that stable, he observed. (Pajhwok)

(17) Taliban Suicide...

police personnel were killed in the blasts and firefight. Spokesman for Kandahar provincial government SamimKhapalwak also rejected Taliban's claim as mere propaganda, saying all the five attackers were killed in less than 30 minutes. The Taliban-led insurgency has been rampant since April 2015 when the militant group launched its annual spring offensive in the conflict-ridden Afghanistan. Kandahar, the birthplace of Taliban and the neighboring Helmand province are notorious for growing poppy and militancy over the past decade. Taliban militants have speeded up activities amid the ongoing regional efforts to bring Taliban fighters into negotiating table with Afghan government. (Xinhua)

(18) Prisoners on ...

rejected the allegations as baseless. Col. Abdul BasirSaeedi insisted there was no problem with food or other facilities provided for prisoners. However, he acknowledged a shortage of wood and other items required for heating rooms. He said the prison administration provided 10 kilograms of wood to each inmate every 24 hours. (Pajhwok)

(19) Rocket Hits ...

and shops in the vicinity. Earlier, the Agha Khan Bank, which also provides loans to people, was hit by a rocket but there were no casualties in the incident. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack. (Pajhwok)

(20) NDS Raids...

statement, terrorists had intended to carry out coordinated attacks in parts of Logar province but NDS along with army and police foiled their plans. Seven terrorists were detained in separate raids, the statement adds. NDS statements usually do not contain exact date of the achievements but they come

after recent activities. (KP)

(21) 100 Families...

a Taliban spokesman claimed the fighters had killed 15 security personnel, including militia commander Mohammad Yousuf, during clashes in the district over the past two days. According to Aqcha district chiefBatoor, nearly 100 families have been displaced to Shiberghan, the capital of the province, and Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh. (Pajhwok)

(22) Kabul University...

with their Pakistani counterparts, students, teachers, journalists and civil society members gathered in front of the Kabul University gate and held a candlelight vigil in the memory of victims. The participants, holding placards, chanted slogans against the attack. The placards were inscribed with slogans "Bacha Khan is the only symbol of peace in the region"..... "I am Hamid Hussain" and "There are no good or bad Taliban". One civil society member, NoorullahNawai, said: "I feel deep sorrow for the victims. It is really shocking. We must come out against this barbaric act and condemn it. "We are proud of Bacha Khan's philosophy of non-violence." A Pashto department student, Amin Pacha, also hailed Bacha Khan as the real hero in Pakhtun history. The attack on the university was an attack on Afghan history and culture, he commented, demanding the prosecution of the assailants. (Pajhwok)

(23) Girl Killed, 6 ...

the injured persons to hospital and the condition of some of them was stated to be critical. The police spokesman urged families not to send their children to mountains for wood collection and other hard work to avoid such painful tragedies. (Pajhwok)

(24) U.S. Envoy ...

period. "We're looking for ways to advance peace and security for Israelis and for Palestinians in accordance with the two-state solution in the future," Shapiro said, adding that the timing of his comments was unintentional, and that he condemned the attack, but reiterated his stance. (Xinhua)

(25) Syrian Army ...

unleashed a wide-scale offensive against the city on Sunday, heavily striking the positions of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front and the Western-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) in that important city. (Xinhua)

(26) EU Security ...

director Rob Wainwright said Islamic State "has the willingness and capability to carry out further attacks in Europe".

Since immediately after the Paris attacks on Nov. 13, in which Islamic State gunmen and suicide bombers killed 130 people, Wainwright, a senior British police officer, has said further similar attacks are likely in Europe and that "lone wolf" militants are no longer the prime threat. (Reuters)

(27) Russia Says

The Russian air blitz has helped Syrian President Bashar Assad's army to launch offensives and seize some key areas from the opposition in recent weeks. The recent gains strengthened the Syrian government's hand ahead of planned talks with the opposition, expected to start this week. (AP)

(28) British Gov't, ...

Organisation's goal of reducing malaria deaths by 90 percent by 2030. "I am determined that our overseas aid budget is spent on the challenges people in Britain want to see addressed -- and those that threaten global and national security," Chancellor Osborne said. (Xinhua)

(29) Thailand Seek ...

include the so-called CLMV states, namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, plus the other ASEAN member states, namely Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, Chokdee said. He added that a Bol representative office will be set up in Yangon next year to streamline the prospective Thai ventures in the neighboring country. (Xinhua)

(30) Russian Economy...

contribute around half of Russian state revenues and the government has said it will have to make cuts to the budget for 2016, which was adopted in October and based on an oil price of \$50 per barrel. Brent crude oil traded above \$31 a barrel on Monday. (AP)